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From: Rodriguez, Elias
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Subject: VI Incident News Clips

DPNR: Methyl Bromide Pesticide Came from Puerto Rico

VI SOURCE

BY LYNDA LOHR

MARCH 25, 2015

Although the use of pesticides containing methyl bromide was discontinued for residential use about 10 years ago because of its impact on the ozone layer, the St. Thomas-based Terminix pest control company was able to buy it in Puerto Rico, Planning and Natural Resources spokesman Jamal Nielsen said Wednesday.

He said they used it in an attempt to eradicate powder post beetles at Sirenusa condominium resort on St. John. Powder post beetles are a type of bug that can turn wood to powder.

Gov. Kenneth E. Mapp said in a Wednesday news release that Planning issued a Stop Use Order to the company which used the pesticide. The entire inventory of the pesticide was placed under quarantine, while local authorities and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency personnel collaborated to determine how to remove and store it appropriately.

The news release indicated there is an investigation underway to determine how and where the product was used elsewhere in the territory.

The pesticide was used to fumigate a room at Sirenusa on March 18. On March 20, members of a vacationing Delaware family suffered seizures and were rushed to Schneider Regional Medical Center with apparent chemical poisoning. Efforts to get updated information on the condition of Steve Esmond, Dr. Theresa Devine and their two children, Ryan and Sean, Wednesday were unsuccessful. Wilmington, Delaware, attorney James J. Maron, who is serving as the family spokesman, did not return two phone calls requesting information.

Maron is an attorney with Maron, Marvel, Bradley, and Anderson, a firm that specializes in "complex mass toxic tort and environmental litigation," its website indicates.

The Government House news release said the family continues to undergo treatment after suspected exposure to methyl bromide. Initially, the family members were treated and stabilized locally before being transferred to medical facilities on the U.S. mainland, where Mapp said their conditions are described as critical but stable.

"The people of the U.S. Virgin Islands pray for the full recovery of the Esmond family. We will continue to do all that is possible to determine how this unprecedented event occurred, and to prevent it from ever happening in the future," Mapp said. "Our residents and visitors can remain confident in the quality and readiness of our healthcare services. For that we are thankful."

Methyl-bromide is listed as a significant ozone depleting substance, considered to be much more harmful to the ozone layer than chlorine. Pesticides containing the substance are no longer allowed for residential use and are scheduled to be completely phased out in the United States by 2017.

When it is used, stringent precautions must be taken, according to Todd Roskin, a licensed pesticide operator on St. John. The building must be evacuated and if the whole building is involved, it must be tented. In the case of smaller areas, a tent must be put up around it.

"They did not tent. It was obviously a clear misuse of the pesticide," Nielsen said.

He said there was some attempt to seal off the Sirenusa unit, which he said was on the bottom floor of the building where the Esmonds were vacationing.

EPA remains at the site doing air testing. EPA spokesman Elias Rodriquez said the crews will also do wipe sampling to determine if there's any residue left from the fumigation.

"We are working to ensure that human health and the environment are protected," Rodriquez said.

He said he expects the crew to be there the remainder of the week.

As for what, if any, punishment Terminix will face, Rodriquez said he couldn't speculate. However, he sent a 39-page list of possible actions that range from warnings to hefty fines and license suspensions.

Del. family poisoned in Virgin Islands has 'stabilized'

Cris Barrish,

The (Delaware) News Journal 4:43 p.m. EDT March 24, 2015

A Tatnall School administrator and his family poisoned by a banned pesticide at a luxury resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands "have stabilized and are showing improvement" after returning to the United States, their spokesman said Tuesday.

Steve Esmond, the head of Tatnall's middle school; his wife, Dr. Theresa Devine; and two teen sons were sickened during a vacation in the Caribbean island of St. John.

The boys, who are in 11th and 9th grade, respectively, at Tatnall, remain in critical condition but all four are getting "tremendous medical care stateside," said Wilmington lawyer James J. Maron, who is acting as the family spokesman. Maron would not say where the family is being treated, citing their need for privacy while recuperating.

Meanwhile, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency investigators are conducting air samples of the \$800-a-night unit at Sirenusa resort, officials said Tuesday.

The EPA said they suspect the family was exposed to the pesticide methyl bromide after it was used to fumigate a room at the complex on Wednesday, March 18, four days after the Esmonds arrived for an eight-night stay. The family began showing ill effects on Friday, when they began having seizures, Maron said.

They were taken to island hospitals and airlifted back to America by Monday, Maron said.

Methyl bromide is an odorless pesticide that can be fatal or cause serious central nervous system and respiratory system damage, according to the EPA.

Because of its "acute toxicity," the pesticide is restricted in the United States and its territories, such as the Virgin Islands, to outdoor use only by certified applicators in certain agricultural settings, the EPA said Monday. Methyl bromide liquid and vapors do not irritate the skin and can take a couple of days before symptoms ranging from mild to serious appear, according to the EPA.

Investigators have confirmed that methyl bromide was applied inside units at the Sirenusa resort "to deal with indoor bugs," and that the agency knows who applied the chemical, said Judith Enck, administrator for EPA's region 2, which includes the Virgin Islands.

Investigators will be "working backward" to determine if other tenants have become ill at Sirenusa or other places where the contractor has fumigated rooms, she said by phone Tuesday from St. Thomas. "It's possible people have fallen ill and not known it."

The agency is taking the Esmonds' poisoning "very seriously," Enck said. "We've got resources on the ground and we need to find out exactly what happened and we're also focused on ensuring that this doesn't happen again."

The Capri is one of 22 Sirenusa villas, many managed and marketed by Sea Glass Vacations.

David Adams, manager of St. John operations for Sea Glass Vacations, issued a written statement Tuesday that said the Esmond family, which he did not name, rented the Capri for nine days, from March 14 through March 22, which was Sunday.

The condo below the Esmonds' villa "was recently treated for pest by Terminix, however, Villa Capri itself had not been so treated," Adams wrote.

Adams wrote that Sea Glass "does not treat the unit it manages for pests but instead relies on licensed professionals for pest control service," and referred all questions to Terminix.

Mary Clare Jensen, a spokeswoman for Memphis, Tennessee-based Terminix, said Tuesday in a statement that "we are cooperating fully with local and federal officials to determine the cause of the incident reported in St. John. At this time, we have limited details so we cannot comment further."

While Maron credited U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, of Delaware, a close friend of the Esmond family, for getting the EPA involved, Enck said her agency would have been done the same for anyone

stricken in the United States or territories within its jurisdiction.

"We would have handled this exactly the same whether or not it was a prominent family," Enck said, adding that EPA staffers visited the family at the hospital in the island of St. Thomas on Sunday and connected doctors there with federal medical experts.

Esmond and Devine are both 49, and their sons are high school students at Tatnall – a prestigious private school in Greenville. The Esmonds lives in Wilmington. Esmond has been at Tatnall for 26 years, and has been a high school history teacher and head football coach.

Maron said that "as the EPA investigation proceeds I await their results. The family went down there for quality time and obviously it's just devastating."

Maron said the chemicals "bio-accumulated and metabolized until it became an acute poisoning." Over the weekend, he said, the family "began having seizures in the middle of the night and their lungs stopped working. They all had to be intubated. This is serious stuff."

Charles A. Tierney, Tatnall's head of school, sent out a notice Sunday to families at the school about the Esmonds' misfortune, and said the community has offered whatever support the family needs.

Tierney described Esmond as a "great school person" who has been head of the middle school, which serves about 130 fifth- to eighth-graders, for the last decade.

"In many ways this is hard to fathom," Tierney said Monday. "It's really so unbelievable. We are all rallying together behind the Esmonds and sending them our prayers and healing wishes."

The Capri in St. John is one of 22 Sirenusa villas managed and marketed by Sea Glass Vacations, according to its Internet listing.(Photo: Sea Glass Vacations)

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